

VZCZCXRO7026
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHAK #5891/01 2851218
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 121218Z OCT 06 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9334
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1879
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKDAI/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEHAK/TSR ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 005891

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2021

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH BACKLASH AGAINST FRANCE GAINS MOMENTUM

REF: ANKARA 5843

Classified by DCM Nancy McEldowney for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In Turkey, anti-French reaction to the October 12 French Assembly approval of a bill that criminalizes denial of the Armenian "genocide" is running high. The GOT had earlier warned French government officials that passage of the bill would severely harm bilateral relations, particularly economic and trade ties. Extensive front-page media coverage and numerous protests in Turkey over the past several days illustrate the serious impact this issue continues to have on Turkish public opinion. The repercussions likely will extend beyond bilateral relations, with impacts on both Turkey-Armenia communications on setting up joint commissions, and Turkey's already difficult EU accession process. The MFA issued a measured public statement immediately after the vote noting Turkish-French relations had "received a heavy blow" (full text in para 8). End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Over the past week, Turkish government officials had stepped up efforts to warn the French government about ramifications, should the bill pass the French National Assembly. President Sezer and FM Gul warned of a serious blow to relations. "If this bill is passed, Turkey will not lose anything but France will lose Turkey," Gul said October ¶11. FM Gul on October 8 also warned his counterpart FM Douste-Blazy that France could forget about winning any tenders in Turkey, including the nuclear energy plant. MFA spokesman Namik Tan repeated to CNN on October 12 that passage of the bill would have an irreparable impact on bilateral relations and it would be impossible to control the public's reaction.

¶3. (SBU) Prime Minister Erdogan reportedly warned French businessmen in Istanbul October 7 that opportunities for French companies would seriously decrease. While calling on France to look to its own colonial past, on October 10 Erdogan also signaled that Turkey would not pursue a tit-for-tat policy over the genocide allegations. At the same time, the Turkish parliament is looking at several possible retaliatory measures. Ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) deputy Mahmut Goksu submitted a draft resolution to the Turkish parliament declaring that France committed genocide in Algeria. On October 11, the parliament's Justice Committee shunted the resolution to a

special subcommittee for further debate. According to press reports, the subcommittee is expected to prepare a report noting that problems related to history should be tackled by historians, not by lawmakers.

¶4. (C) Turks from across the political spectrum increased their lobbying efforts in advance of the French Assembly vote, to no avail. AKP deputy Murat Mercan had told us October 10 that he thought their interventions had a chance, albeit slim, of causing the vote to be delayed. Mercan noted Erdogan's comment that two wrongs do not make a right and at first said the GOT will not undertake retaliatory measures. He then admitted that of course the government would have to undertake such measures and do so visibly for their domestic audience. Following a bipartisan delegation of Turkish parliamentarians last week (reftel), CHP vice-chairman Onur Oymen reportedly left for Paris to continue to apply pressure.

¶5. (C) Headlines denouncing France and the bill have dominated newspapers for days. The French Embassy in Ankara is facing its third day of mass demonstrations, which are primarily small in nature but involve several groups in ongoing protest, including throwing eggs. Turkish business groups are planning organized boycotts of French goods. Several politicians from a variety of parties have told us this issue coming at this time has further poisoned the atmosphere toward the EU and increased what is an already high-level of public sentiment that is anti-EU and nationalistic.

¶6. (SBU) EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn warned publicly that passage of the bill would have

ANKARA 00005891 002 OF 003

"counter-productive" consequences for EU-Turkey relations and freedom of speech. Echoing comments by French President Chirac (reftel), French socialist presidential front-runner Segolene Royal further roiled the waters here, telling reporters October 11 that Turkey must recognize the Armenian "genocide" to enter the EU.

¶7. (C) Comment: This is further exacerbating already stepped up nationalism and negative attitudes toward the West and EU here. The bill must now pass the French Senate and be approved by the President. Because of domestic political calculations, however, the GOT will be under pressure to take retaliatory actions now, such as cutting economic ties. The issue will continue to fester, hindering progress on joint governmental and historical commissions with Armenia. It also has the potential to throw a further wrench into Turkey's EU accession process, which is already approaching a crunch-point over the GOT's unfulfilled obligation to open its ports and airports to the Republic of Cyprus -- another issue where, from Ankara's point of view, the French have been less than helpful. End Comment.

¶8. (U) Begin full text of unofficial embassy translation of the MFA announcement on October 12, 2006:

Turkish-French relations, which have a long history and which have been developed meticulously over centuries, today received a heavy blow as a result of irresponsible initiatives based on untrue allegations by some French politicians who are not able to see the consequences of the policies they pursue.

Despite all of our diplomatic and parliamentary initiatives mobilized at the highest levels for a long time and which were pursued hand in hand with our citizens resident in France, our NGOs and business circles, the draft law, which was introduced by the Socialist Party in May to the French National Assembly but which was not adopted (then), this time again was carried on the agenda on October 12. We feel a deep regret for the fact that the draft law, which brings severe punitive sanctions to the denial of the untrue

Armenian genocide (allegation), was adopted by the National Assembly.

Although the enactment of the bill requires a long process, including a return to the Assembly after the Senate takes it up and then sending it to the President, this first legislative step by the National Assembly has created a great disappointment in our country. During this legislative process for the draft to fail we will continue all our efforts and initiatives at all levels and through all channels. The fact that in recent days strong criticism was voiced against the draft law in France demonstrated in France, too, could not absorb it, that there was no consensus in the public on the draft and that this unfortunate initiative could not find serious support. But none of this should diminish the seriousness of the incident.

This draft law, which violates the French Constitutional system that regards freedom of expression above all other Constitutional rights and the European Convention that clearly spells out under which exceptional circumstances could freedom of expression in democratic societies be restricted with laws, has been at odds with the values that have been until now associated with the French nation, which was the cradle of civilization and which inspired the free world with its 'freedom, equality and fraternity' concepts.

It is a striking contradiction that the parliament of a country, which when challenged to face its own history, claims that parliaments do not have an authority to re-write history and that the responsibility lies on historians, could reach as assessment on the history of other states, and assume the authority to impose punitive sanctions.

Despite important reforms that we adopted in recent years further expanding basic rights and freedoms, and during a period when suggestions have been made to our country for taking further steps for freedom of expression, it is a double standard that such a bill came on the agenda in

ANKARA 00005891 003 OF 003

France. Credibility of states depends on how much they can claim/embrace themselves the values that they have been preaching.

This draft law, which takes hostage the freedom of expression in a fashion that cannot match a democratic regime, created a deep anger in the Turkish nation, including our Armenian citizens with whom we have been living together for centuries.

The 70-million strong Turkish nation rejects the restriction of freedom of expression based on untrue allegations. With this draft law France unfortunately lost its privileged standing in the eyes of the Turkish nation.

End text.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON